

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

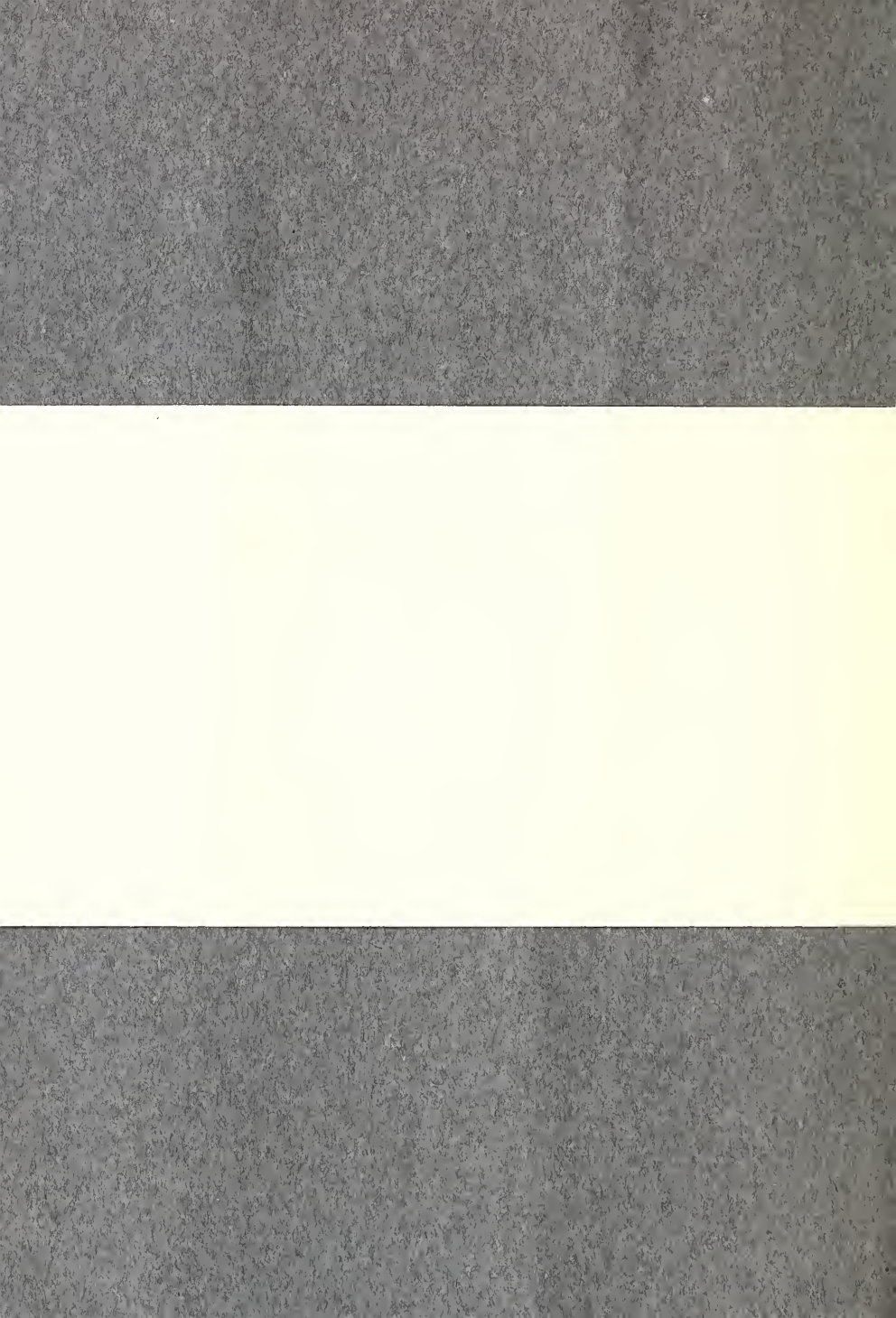
A MEMORIAL

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COMPLIMENTS OF
W. R. CURRAN
PEKIN, ILLINOIS

On the Occasion of the
Celebration of the 100th Anniversary of His
Birth by Joe Hanna Post, G. A. R.



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A MEMORIAL

DELIVERED BY

W. R. CURRAN

AT PEKIN, ILLINOIS

February 12, 1909

On the Occasion of the
Celebration of the 100th Anniversary of His
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A MEMORIAL

In the morning of time it was written:

“He stretcheth out the North
over empty space,
And hangeth the earth upon
nothing.”

* * * * *

“He putteth forth his hand upon
the flinty rock;
He overturneth the mountains by
the roots,
He cutteth out channels among the
rocks,
And his eye seeth every precious
thing.”

This is a great truth uttered by the voice of the primitive children of men. When we look, we see the same truth, written in the earth, upon the flinty rock, among the roots of the overturned mountains, in the channels cut in the rocks and in the many waters of the earth; we see and know the truth that there is no precious thing but by the finger of God.

In the mountain fastness of the Sierras, on the

western slope of this virgin continent, in a canyon of a tributary of the mighty Columbia, where it rolls to the sea, is a great medallion, in the side of the mountain, high above the rushing waters; cut in the flinty rock where the mountains were uprooted, chiseled in the channels among the rocks; as the ages have gone by, with the frost of winter and the heat of summer, the snow and rain, the earthquake, the blasts of the mountain storm, the soft breath of spring, the shock of the lightning and the gentle touch of the dew; these forces have wrought and finished the picture, ages before man saw the mountain.

The medallion is the profile of the great emancipator, so life-like and vivid as to be almost uncanny to the beholder. It may be coincident that in the rugged lines of granite, are limned on the mountain side, the sad and tender image of this martyr of liberty; but that his personality was wrought into the very heart and life of this nation, followed as the fruit follows the flower, it is the fulfillment of prophecy. The image cut in the rocks may be accident, but that men should love liberty and love him who died for liberty is divine. This is the precious thing that the eye of Divinity beholds in us. The medallion will last as long as the mountain, but our love for the man will span eternity. "The world will little note nor long remember what we say here, but it will never forget what (he) did here."

Greatness was at flood tide in the year 1809; the world was then blessed in the birth of genius, in the realm of literature, invention, music, science and

statecraft. The birth of Edgar Allen Poe, Oliver Wendell Holmes and Alfred Tennyson, all famous in letters; of Cyrus H. McCormack, whose invention of the reaper, was the first real advance upon the reaping hook, used by Ruth in the fields of Boaz; of Mendelssohn and Chopin, who challenged the admiration of the world in creative harmony; of Charles R. Darwin, who made mankind debtor to him in fields of unexplored science; of William Ewart Gladstone who was a colossal figure in the government of Europe; of Abraham Lincoln who dominated the statecraft of the western hemisphere, preserved the Union, and made millions of serfs free men, all occurred in that year.

It was a great year in a great century of the evolution of democracy. In the sense here used, democracy is defined by one who is an advanced and clear thinker on the subject; to be "a social institution or state made up of individuals whose actuating principle of life is this: that they will have nothing, will accept nothing, but what every other individual in the whole compact shall be entitled to have—exactly the same thing on exactly the same terms; and whose united effort shall be to establish such ways and means as shall make the working principle of each individual actualized in all the out-workings of the state as a whole."

This is an epoch making idea. A man of genius imbued with this ideal is destined to be an epoch maker. His life is a menace to the special privilege

of one individual over another, and the dominant right of one man over his fellowmen. The vested rights of the few, to the exclusion of the many, on like terms are a stench in his nostrils and the fact that he lives, makes the battle field a certainty. The life of such a man must make history. The chapters of its story will be of progress toward the realization of the dominant ideal. To him the plan of progress is:

"Where the vanguard camps to-day,
The rear shall rest to-morrow."

Abraham Lincoln, born in the wilderness, rocked in the cradle of poverty, fed on the bread of bitterness, taught in the wisdom of the clods of the valley and the stars of the heavens, was an heir to this ideal, and these conditions.

He stood alone, a product of the evolution of democracy; in characteristics without a predecessor, without a fellow, and without a successor.

"Nature they say, doth dote,
And cannot make a man
Save on some worn-out plan.
Repeating us by rote:
For him her Old-World moulds aside she threw,
And choosing sweet clay from the breast
Of the unexhausted west,
With stuff untainted shaped a hero new,
Wise, steadfast in the strength of God, and true."

The mettle of the blue-grass pastures of Kentucky gave him birth; but the sheltering woods of Indiana and the blooming prairies of Illinois, developed and matured him to the flower and fruitage of his great manhood.

He was born a plebian and was glad of it when he said, "God must have liked common people, for he

made so many of them." The common people liked him and heard him gladly. He always was and now is numbered among them; reared in the wilderness, the child of the frontier of a new civilization, free from traditions and conventionalities, uninfluenced by the schools, and not enervated by the fevered ideals of the older civilizations; it was not necessary for this man, to serve a Midian probation to make him a great leader of his people.

The foot-hills are not the proper point of vantage from which to view the mountains' grandeur; only distance lends the angle of vision wide enough to comprehend the impressive magnitude and beauty of God's great handy-work. The lines are long, rugged, angular, rough and severe to a close view; but how harmonious, strong, graceful and full of beauty they are to the view from the distant plain! As wide space is necessary to see the mountain's beauty, so distance, in time, is required to study the character of this great man and learn his strength and grandeur.

But little more than forty years have passed since this man fell by the blow of an assassin induced by hate. His short public life in the eye of the nation was lived amid the roar of cannon, the clash of musketry, the shock of battle, the curses of defeat and the shouts of victory, but only now, are we come to the stillness after the storm, when we can commence to know him and appreciate the grandeur of his character and worth, uninfluenced by passion and hate or partial pride. While he wrought, he was re-

fined by the white heat of the fierce fires that burned in the crucible of sectional hate; that reduced the senate of the nation from the high level of dignified and orderly discussion to a scene of physical violence that spent its final force in the fierce conflict of neighbor against neighbor, brother against brother, and state against state; yet amid it all, his heart was not corroded by hatred or a wish for vengeance. With more military power than Caesar he was a minister of mercy; at Appomattox he received by the hand of his commander in the field, the surrender of one of the greatest military leaders of his century and at Richmond, by his own hand, ministered to the necessities of the victims of the lost cause.

As a member of congress he ridiculed his military prowess; yet as president of the republic, he was commander-in-chief of the mightiest armies of modern times. Those forces were used, not for conquest of alien territory or the military glory of the commander-in-chief; no battle was fought, or victory won except to preserve the integrity of the Union.

Amid the cares of state and the marching of its battallions, the coming and going of the captains, he was not too much engrossed to write, or talk to the widow, pardon her son, for military offense, or confer with the private soldier about his pension. The stars of the night were his watchmen, as he went from tent to tent, ministering to the wants of the sick and wounded after the battles; yet it was the irony of fate, that this man's life should be so misunderstood that an enemy should kill him as a tyrant.

His death by violence was not an accident, or a decree of arbitrary providence. "He lived as he did, and died as he did, because he was what he was." His character, placed him in the path of the destroyer. His life was the exponent of freedom for all men. The hand that struck him down was the representative of the master of serfs. The blow was struck by stealth, because it came from the power of darkness, and the darkness comprehended not the light.

His was the crown of modesty; throughout his life he had sacrificed self that others might wear the laurel of victory; among the leaders of the bar of his state, he considered his fellows better lawyers than himself; when called to the presidency of the republic at the age of fifty-two, he came without training in national affairs, and without experience of any sort to fit him for the great duties that devolved upon him, except his training as a lawyer. At the threshold of his administration, lurked armed rebellion with the firm resolution to dismember the Union. He was doubtful of his ability to perform the great task that rested upon him, "greater than that which rested upon Washington." His countrymen were apprehensive; while continental Europe prophesied failure and the end of the republic seemed imminent.

Abraham Lincoln was chosen president, not because of his personality or availability, but on account of the ideals that he represented. The issue was clearly joined and freedom won the ballot,

though in the minority. Not all the miraculous victories of the few over the many, and the weak over the strong, are written in ancient Hebrew history.

It was not in the great debates of 1858 alone, that the ideals of Lincoln became known to his countrymen; they were first stated in Peoria, in reply to his great antagonist, on October 16th, 1854. It was on this day, and at this place that the great emancipator set his face toward the presidency and martyrdom.

In that great address, speaking of slavery he said: "I hate it because of the monstrous injustice of slavery itself. I hate it because it deprives our republican example of its just influence in the world; enables the enemies of free institutions with plausibility to taunt us as hypocrites; causes the real friends of freedom to doubt our sincerity; and especially because it forces so many good men among ourselves into an open war with the very fundamental principles of civil liberty, criticising the declaration of independence and insisting that there is no right principle of action but self interest." * * * * *

"What I do say is, that no man is good enough to govern another man without that other's consent. I say this is the leading principle, the sheet-anchor of American republicanism.

But Nebraska is urged as a great Union saving measure. Well, I too go for saving the Union. Much as I hate slavery, I would consent to the ex-

tension of it rather than see the Union dissolved; just as I would consent to any great evil to avoid a greater one." * * * * *

"Slavery is founded on the selfishness of man's nature. Opposition to it in his love of justice. These principles are an eternal antagonism and when brought into collision so fiercely as slavery extension brings them shocks and throes and convulsions must ceaselessly follow. Repeal the Missouri Compromise, repeal all compromises, repeal the declaration of Independence, repeal all past history; you still cannot repeal human nature."

On the 15th of August, 1855, in a private letter to a personal friend, he wrote: "Our political problem now is, can we as a nation continue together permanently, forever, half slave and half free? The problem is too mighty for me. May God, in his mercy, superintend the solution."

This was a long time prior to his announcement that a house divided against itself cannot stand.

At Independence Hall on his way to Washington to his inauguration with the threat and menace of assination hovering over him, in closing his address he said: "But I have said nothing but what I am willing to live by and if it be the pleasure of Almighty God, to die by."

In August, 1862, amid the darkness, doubt, and censure of friend and foe, he wrote:

"If there be those who would not save the Union unless they could at the same time save slavery, I do not agree with them. If there be those who would

not save the Union unless they could at the same time destroy slavery, I do not agree with them. My paramount object in this struggle is to save the Union, and is not either to save or destroy slavery. If I could save the Union without freeing any slave, I would do it; and if I could save it by freeing all the slaves, I would do it; and if I could save it by freeing some and leaving others alone, I would also do that. What I do about slavery and the colored race, I do because I believe it helps to save the Union; and what I forbear I forbear because I do not believe it would help to save the Union."

With him, integrity and a fixed purpose were matters of principle and not of proclamation. He was chosen president as a radical, but in his administration, he had the unstinted censure of both radicals and conservatives; his heart was tender and pliable as a child's in matters of mercy: but neither the threats of one faction or cajolery of the other moved him an iota from his fixed purpose. His paramount purpose was to save the Union at all hazards; his secondary purpose was to prevent the extension of slavery and ultimately to abolish it. His mind grasped the fundamental truth that the Union must be preserved to assure liberty to the white man as well as the black man; that freedom to the slave without the Union would be a curse to both the slave and master; that the one without the other would be but an apple of the dead sea, that would wither to ashes in the hand that plucked it.

No act of his and no word reveals an uncertain

moment in this matter. His mind was fixed on it, and there was no variableness or shadow of turning.

At his first inaugural, speaking to the nation, his closing words were:

"In your hands my dissatisfied fellow countrymen, and not in mine, is the momentous issue of civil war. The government will not assail you. You can have no conflict without being yourselves the aggressors. You have no oath registered in Heaven to destroy the government, while I shall have the most solemn one to preserve, protect and defend it.

I am loath to close. We are not enemies, but friends. We must not be enemies. Though passion may have strained, it must not break our bonds of affection. The mystic chords of memory, stretching from every battlefield and patriot grave to every living heart and hearthstone, all over this broad land, will yet swell the chorus of the Union, when again touched, as surely they will be by the better angels of our nature."

Here the statesman rose almost to the altitude of a prophet. While these words were being uttered from the steps of the Capitol, secession was looking him in the face and whetting its sword for the fray. His matchless strategy put the government in the right and its enemies in the wrong. He waited until slavery attacked the Union. In repelling that attack, his great opportunity came. The Union was saved and slavery was destroyed at one blow. Slavery brought on the war and was devoured by the dogs of war that it loosed from their leash.

Lincoln was a great leader of men and a leader of great men. His choice of a cabinet put him in the front rank. He chose as his constitutional advisors those who had been candidates against him in the national convention, on the theory that they would be of more service to the nation and less detriment to his administration in the cabinet than out of it. He was expected to be the tool of his cabinet, there was rivalry to determine who should dominate him; but his matchless tact neutralized the idea, and the members of his political family learned that his was the dominant mind of his administration.

Emancipation was considered long before the event. The radicals urged it and the conservatives derided it. Its friends censured him as vacillating, its enemies as a tyrant, if he attempted it. With patience borne of his great soul and the grace of God, this lone man of the west wrestled with the problem. With the draft of the great document in his desk, ready for signature, week after week he met delegations of strong men who came to urge such a measure. He argued against it, to get the benefit of their arguments for it, with such vigor that the nation was convinced that he never would do it. He let the delegations come and go, day after day, without a hint of what he intended to do; while he waited for a victory to give the proclamation force.

When the time came he told the cabinet, what he was going to do; told them that he had promised his Maker that he would do it; that he would accept suggestions from them as to the form of the document

but not as to the advisability of the act; that the responsibility was his. In the nation's throes of dissolution he issued the proclamation as a war measure to save the Union. This is the crowning act of his great life and because of it, the laurel of the victor's crown rested upon his brow, and his name is to-day hailed by the glad acclaim of the world's millions who love liberty. Between the proclamation and the fall of the confederacy was the darkness before the dawn; into it the nation and its great leader went under the pall and shadow of death and the flower of the sons of the north and the flower of the sons of the south were the sacrifice, before the dawning.

The fixed purpose and loving heart of this great man are finally revealed in the closing sentences of his second inaugural. This is almost his last public utterance to the nation.

"Fondly do we hope—fervently do we pray—that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet, if God wills that it continues until all the wealth piled by the bondman's two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn by the lash shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said: 'The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.'

With malice toward none; with charity for all; with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in; to bind up the nation's wounds; to care for him who

shall have borne the battle, and for his widow—and his orphan—to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves, and with all nations."

No more exalted utterance than this has been made by the tongue of man since the Galilean uttered the Beatitudes on the Horns of Hattin.

Those who attempt to account for Abraham Lincoln are met by many contradictions. They assume that his character was simple, easily understood and that he took all men into his confidence. They are surprised to find that he was complex in character, his life misunderstood, and that he probably never took any one man into his entire confidence. It has been supposed that he was without ambition; yet without ambition he never would have been president of the Republic. He was censured for too much levity and not deep enough of mind to comprehend the gravity of the nation's woes; yet we know that his smiles and wit covered a breaking heart while he trod the wine press in misery; his face wreathed in laughter, his heart melted in tears. He patiently bore the reputation of a cruel tyrant; while he was in the gall of bitterness, in sympathy for all who suffer. He was great enough to bear the stigma of a weakling at the hands of his friends while he waited to show them that he was strong enough to lead the nation to salvation.

The son of a father and mother who could not write and without a liberal education, he was one of the matchless masters of the English tongue, un-

taught by the teachers of logic, he was easily the greatest political logician of his age; without the aid of the teachers of oratory he was among the greatest political controvertialists of his time; with few of the graces of the orator he delivered the most notable oration of his century; with the reputation of a rebel against God, he passed across the stage of action, like one of the patriarchs of old, knowing that "the just shall live by faith," God-fearing and God-lead.

"Here was a type of the true elder race,
And one of Plutarch's men talked with us face to face.

* * * * *

He knew to bide his time,
And can his fame abide,
Still patient in his simple faith sublime,
Till the wise years decide.
Great captains with their guns and drums,
Disturb our judgment for the hour,
But at last silence comes;
These are all gone, and, standing like a tower,
Our children shall behold his fame,
The kindly-earnest, brave, forseeing man,
Sagacious, patient, dreading praise, not blame.
New birth of our new soil, the first American."

